

Land Records:

A FAMILY HISTORIAN'S "BREAD AND BUTTER"

Amber Oldenburg – One Branch at a Time Genealogy

Amber@onebranchatatime.com

Land records are one of the major record groups used by genealogists when performing United State research due to their extensive coverage, availability, and valuable information.

Land records usually pre-date vital records and may pre-date census and church records in some areas.

State Land States

Connecticut	Delaware	Georgia
Hawaii	Kentucky	Maine
Maryland	Massachusetts	New Hampshire
New Jersey	New York	North Carolina
Pennsylvania	Rhode Island	South Carolina
Tennessee	Texas	Vermont
Virginia	West Virginia	

Federal Land States

Alabama	Alaska	Arizona	Arkansas
California	Colorado	District of Columbia	Florida
Idaho	Illinois	Indiana	Iowa
Kansas	Louisiana	Michigan	Minnesota
Mississippi	Missouri	Montana	Nebraska
Nevada	New Mexico	North Dakota	Ohio
Oklahoma	Oregon	South Dakota	Utah
Washington	Wisconsin	Wyoming	

Terms and Definitions

- **Application** – A petition to appropriate officials to acquire land
- **Bounty land** – Land awarded by a state or federal government to veterans or their heirs for military service
- **Deed (n.)** – Document that records a land transaction between individuals, companies, or organizations

- **Deed (v.)** – To convey or grant real property
- **Dower right** – A share of the land owned by a woman’s husband during marriage that was designated for her support during widowhood
- **Et al** – “And others”
- **Et ux** – “And wife”
- **Grant** – A government-authorized right of title to property previously owned by a government entity
- **Grantee** – Buyer
- **Grantor** – Seller
- **Indenture** – A formal or official document
- **Land office** – Government office that handled applications to purchase federal or state land and issued patents
- **Metes and Bounds** – Survey method used by state-land states. Described land by measuring and naming boundary features
- **Patent** – The final document issued to a purchaser by a government for the purchase of property previously owned by the government. Also known as the first-title deed
- **Ranges** – Imaginary lines that run north and south and are six miles apart. They form the east and west boundaries of a township
- **Rectangular survey** – Survey method used by federal-land states. Described land by its position within a township and section
- **Section** – A one-square mile piece of land within a township. Each section contains about 640 acres
- **Survey** – Inspection and recording of the boundaries of a piece of property
- **Township** – A 36-square-mile piece of land within a specific meridian
- **Tract book** – Contained the paperwork concerning land purchases, including the purchaser’s name and the location of the property
- **Warrant** – A document that declared an individual’s right to a specific property and authorized a surveyor to survey that property

Why Use Land Records

- Land records place individuals in a specific place at a specific time
- Created soon after an individual arrived at a specific place and then again when they left
- Can indicate where someone came from or where they were going
- Individuals who are not found in other records can be found in land records
- Land records were often the only records recreated after a courthouse fire or other destructive event
- They can help distinguish between two individuals with the same name in the same place during the same period of time
- Witnesses on land records may be relatives or part of an individual’s FAN club

Where to Access Land Records

FamilySearch Wiki

The FamilySearch Wiki page for each state or country will have information about available records. It will also include links to online repositories and information about physical repositories that contain land records.

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

FamilySearch Catalog

Allows you to access digitized microfilm. Over 1,500 US counties have land records on the catalog.

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>

Bureau of Land Management/ General Land Office Records

Search for patents issued by the federal government.

<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>

Ancestry.com

Has several land record databases. Can search general land record databases or by individual state databases.

https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/clp_land/

Additional Resources

Christine Rose, *Military Bounty Land 1776-1855* (San Jose, California: CR Publications, 2011).

E. Wade Home, *Land and Property Research in the United States* (Salt Lake City Utah: Ancestry Incorporated, 1997).

Loretto Dennis Szucs & Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry Incorporated, 1997), chapter 8.

Val Greenwood, *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2017), chapters 19, 20, 21.